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ABSTRACT

This study examines the fundamental thesis of whether exposure to prosocial and antisocial media-provided models significantly affects the behavior of youths (ages 7 to 17) while engaged in sports or athletics. The research group evaluated three different groups and three separate samples--prosocial, antisocial, and a control group--dividing the 255 subjects into four sports categories: hockey, lacrosse, girls' baseball, and boys' baseball. A combined methodology of seeing and observing teams, semi-directed focused interviews, and written opinionnaires were used to study viewing characteristics and monitor actual changes in sports goals and behavior. Overall findings suggest that antisocial models do not necessarily lead to increased levels of aggression, although prosocial models significantly decrease physical and verbal aggression. Recommendations of the study support future research and encourage media policies that promote participatory goals as opposed to winning-at-all-costs goals, and increase or stress the prosocial content of amateur or professional athletics. Mass media was found to be a definite vehicle for providing appropriate prosocial models that could influence a vast number of participants involved in youth sports and athletics. (RAA)

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SIR/CAR* - STUDIES OF TELEVISION AND YOUTH SPORTS

by

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and

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SIR/CAR*- STUDIES OF TELEVISION AND YOUTH SPORTS

by: Principal Investigators:

Dick Moriarty (Human Kinetics) and
Ann McCabe (Psychology)

All this talk about violence in the media is a lot of bunk to me because it is a part of life, it always has been and I think it always will be. What in the world would you do with Shakespear, for example. Look at Hamlet, everyone winds up dead! Is that bad? What about King Lear! What about Macbeth - these murders! What would you do with opera? Can you imagine opera without violence. Why it is marvelous entertainment.

(Gordon Sinclair from "Reflections on Violence", 1976)

SIR/CAR STUDY

There can be no doubt that there is cause for concern within our North American society where the influence of television on youth pervades their everyday life. This is a society where 96% of the homes have at least one television set viewed by each member of the family 6 hours per day, 42 hours per week. It has been estimated that adults spend 28% of their leisure time viewing television while pre-school children are exposed to television for 20% of their waking hours. By the time an average North American youth leaves their teens they will have spent one-sixth of their life, or

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*SIR/CAR is a registered trademark for the Sports Institute for Research/Change Agent Research which is housed in the Faculty of Human Kinetics, University of Windsor, Windsor, Ontario, Canada. This study was conducted on a research grant from the Ontario Royal Commission on Violence in the Communications Industry.

20,000 hours in front of the T.V. set as opposed to 13,000 hours in a school system. In terms of aggression and violence approximately 3/4 of the shows feature violence to a certain extent and approximately one-third of all occupations portrayed are concerned with suppressing crime. In 1967 94% of cartoon shows contained violence as part of their story plot. Although the violence level in sports/athletics shown on television is comparatively low, it becomes significant in that it is a real world violence and not the simulated type that is characteristic of other Television presentations as pointed out by Carl Stokes in the NBC television special,

> Sports provide us with most of the authentic violence we watch, not the simulated violence of movies or television drama but the real thing! Often blood thirsty, people punching people, kicking each other, cars crashing into cars, blood spilling and flesh splitting, all for our entertainment. And some times when the traditional sports don't provide enough emotional kick we invent new ones, or give the old ones a new brutal twist.

Dr. John McCarthy, Ivy League Hockey Coach, stated in "Violence in America":

> I believe sports are becoming more violent and I think that again is related to the culture as a whole. The culture is more permissive and, I think, as the culture becomes more permissive you see an acceleration of behaviors on the parts of people. Acts that formerly would have been considered aggressive acts now become ordinary, and, I think people have become jaded. And as people become more jaded, I think, they become more accustomed and accept these acts more and probably want more aggression.
>
> If there is a person coming out for sports who has a tendency to act in a violent fashion, sports may encourage this violent behavior, and legitimize it. So that there is a distinct possibility of making a violent person more violent.

IDENTIFICATION OF PROBLEM

Television has become a dominant force in the life of youth. There have been continuous efforts by social researchers to try and understand the implications of this increasingly dominant medium upon a child's development. However, most of the studies have narrowly focused upon a cause and effect relationship between violence on television and the anti-social behavior of the young viewer. Few focus on the potential effect of pro-social behavior models and hardly any on sports and athletics that are a socially significant factor in the life of a vast number of children in North America. We do not fully understand the effect of televised sports and athletics upon youth since (a) little study has been conducted, (b) the studies which have been done have had contradictory results, and (c) the pro-social effects of watching television have been largely ignored.

When it was pointed out to the "Ontario Royal Commission on Violence" in the Communications Industry (ORCVCI) that this area had been neglected in previous studies and that the amount of T.V. sport/athletics had doubled between 1961 and 1976, and that violent aggressive athletics had consistently exceeded non-violent sport presentations, the commission authorized funds to investigate this problem. The University of Windsor's Sport Institute for Research/Change Agent Research, commonly referred to as SIR/CAR, assembled a task force including theoreticians and practitioners from education, research, sport/athletics and media. The task set

forth was one of determining the cause and effect relationship between pro-social models and anti-social media models on sport or athletic behavior in youth sports. SIR/CAR examined the fundamental thesis of whether or not exposure to media (pro-social and anti-social) provided models which would significantly effect the behavior in youth ranging in age from 7 to 17 while engaged in sports/athletics.

DELINEATION

By using a computer retrieval system and employing a diligent task force for the purpose of manual investigations, extensive research and development materials have been obtained in the area of aggression and violence. Access to the 23,000 documents collected by the J. Walker Thompson Advertising Agency of Detroit in their studies of media violence in the marketing industry greatly facilitated the research and development phase of this study. T.V., tapes, films and audio tapes were also available through public and commercial broadcasting companies. An example of this is material observed from the extensive library of ABC's Wide World of Sports which offers a varied range of sports/athletics offerings. Herein are contained competitive levels ranging from youth sports to high level amateur and professional athletics. Numerous instances of anti-social and a limited number of pro-social behaviors are contained therein. These sources were agumented by hockey films from Hockey Night in Canada and films from the Molson's Sport Film

Library; Canadian and Ontario Lacrosse Associations, Peterborough Cable T.V.,Canadian Broadcasting Company's Windsor outlet CBET-TV, Major League Baseball Films and McLaren Advertising Company of Toronto producers of Hockey Night in Canada.

EXPERIMENTAL

In order to meet the challenge of this study, 30 members of the task force were assembled including a developmental psychologist, university sports director, communications study professor, representatives of media and organized sport for children and youth.

The research evaluated 3 different age groups and 3 separate samples; experimental pro-social, experimental anti-social, and a control group. Overall the design of this study divided the 255 subjects into four groups; hockey = 152, lacrosse = 45, boys baseball = 44, girls baseball = 14.

Experimental group 1 were subjects who were observed, then exposed to pro-social models and then observed. Pro-social behavior was defined in the study as any act that is directed towards others and appears to have been meant to enhance in some way, the physical, psychological, or social well being of that person or group.

Experimental group 2 were subjects who were observed, then exposed to anti-social models, then observed and exposed to anti-social models and then observed. Anti-social

behavior was defined in the study as any non-verbal behavior that appears intended to demean, intimidate or threaten that person or group. This includes physical contact encoutered beyond the acceptable rules of the game.

Group 3 was the control group, where subjects were observed at intervals corresponding to the experimental groups but received either neutral or no television treatment.

In other studies of a similar nature, the increase in aggression and violence as the regular season proceeds from early to late playoffs had been an uncontrollable variable affecting subject behavior. Fortunately in this study, the use of a laboratory/field setting allowed the task force to eliminate this major intervening variable that had affected previous studies.

The research task force futher attempted to control variables by the use of an opinionnaire on regular viewing behavior. The opinionnaire allowed for an assessment of behavior outside the experimental setting. Media monitoring and personal observation of facial, verbal and physical behavior in sport settings allowed identification of groups with substantially equal baseline behavior.

A unique method developed by SIR/CAR was used for collecting and analysing the data. This method is referred to as the SAW approach. The S represents seeing or observing teams; the A represents asking by means of a Semi-Directed Focused Interview; and the W represents a written opinionnaire. This technique of data collection proved invaluable to the study

since it allowed comparison and monitoring of change in both avowed goals and actual behavior.

In addition, changes in perception of violence were detected by using a modified "View-Master," to test whether any change in perception of aggressive and non-aggressive behavior had occurred. Subjects were exposed to 16 slides representing a collection of stimuli that were to be judged as either aggressive or non-aggressive events, or scenes. The slides were paired according to activities so that a preference toward an activity would not be a factor in this binocular rivalry situation. After a brief exposure, subjects were to describe as best they could, what was happening in the picture.

ACTION

The thrust of this laboratory/field research project was to control as much as possible, the exposure of groups of youths to either pro-social, anti-social or neutral television inputs in the area of their participation while they were in the field/laboratory situation. At the same time the degree, extent and types of programming they were exposed to when outside the confines of the research was monitored. This situation was assessed and found to be substantially equal within the various sports.

The overall findings of this study suggest that exposure to anti-social media models do not necessarily lead to increased levels of aggression among youth participants in

organized sports. The anti-social media exposure refers to both that material experimentally introduced as well as those programs viewed at home that were considered to contain aggressive content. On the other hand, exposure to pro-social media models significantly decreased physical and verbal aggression.

The viewing habits of children and youth involved in this study suggests that they prefer to watch sports/athletics, situation comedies and cartoons rather than mystery, adventure or dramatic productions. Hockey ranks first with baseball a distant second in terms of most commonly viewed sports/athletics activities. There is a moderate interest in boxing, car racing, and track and field.

The time spent viewing television varied considerably across the subjects and ranged from as few as 10 hours per week to as much as 50 hours per week. Seasonally there was little variance in the concentration of viewing and more than half of their viewtime was confined to the evening hours. The perception of violence, as assessed by binocular rivalry, was not significantly changed due to their exposure to pro or anti-social inputs. However, a slight tendency occurred toward the perception of violence amongst those groups exposed to anti-social behavior and toward the perception of less violence among the pro-social groups. In other words, those viewing anti-social T.V. inputs were sensitized rather than desensitized to violence.

On the basis of the results of this test, it can be

concluded that exposure to pro-social programming has a greater effect on the behavior of children than does exposure to anti-social programming. Some cautions are in order however. The viewing habits of those playing baseball (both boys and girls) showed less preference for aggressive, violent athletics than those boys involved in either lacrosse or hockey.

Why do children choose one sport over another? It was not possible to investigate this question within the confines of this study but characteristics which led to the selection of one over the other may be influential in their interaction with media exposure. Children electing to play hockey and lacrosse may be more aggressive than those electing to play baseball and therefore this is a factor which is likely to influence their selecting of pro-social sport or anti-social athletics in television.

A second unknown in this study was whether youth who do not participate in organized sports are systematically different from those who do. This study must be concerned only with those who engage in team sports; however, other studies show this to be a large portion of the population of children/youth. Replication of this study should include a control group of non-participants. Group behavior and not individual behavior was the main focus of this study. Future studies could easily monitor individual effects by fortuitously seizing upon uniform colours and numbers which provide a convenient identification system in sport/athletics.

Data gathered from the Binocular Rivalry portion of the study is not conclusive enough to suggest that there is a desensitization to violence as a result of exposure to anti-social material. Quite the contrary, players exposed to the anti-social inputs had a slight tendency to see more aggression than those exposed to pro-social inputs. Although trends were not statistically reliable the thrust is toward sensitization.

Trends from the Written Opinionnaire reveal that:

1. Televison viewing (especially sports/athletics) occupies a large part of the life of youth.
2. The number of hours of television viewing leans heavily towards sport/athletics and is biased towards aggressive athletics such as hockey and football.
3. Cartoons and comedy are ranked over mystery, adventure and drama amongst those shows which are nonsport/athletic in nature.
4. Expression of attitudes revealed a dichotomy between those involved in baseball and those involved in hockey and lacrosse. Participants of baseball identified with the true amateur sport model while those in hockey and lacrosse identified with the professional athletic model and orientation.
5. Among those programs listed by the participants of this study, the proportion of very non-aggressive shows and non-aggressive shows out-weighed the aggressive and very aggressive shows as does the media diet available to North American youth.

With respect to the interface of television and sports/athletics, there are 2 classifications for recommendations (1) Future Research and (2) Media policy.

Future Research. There is an extreme scarcity of research in the area of sports/athletics and the media, thereby necessitating a call for further study. This is vital, due to the importance of the role of sports in a child's development and socialization. Further, the laboratory/field research method as exemplified by this study would appear to be a superior method of investigation for this particular problem. This is supported by the fact that there is a lack of integration between laboratory research and field studies as well as conflicting results emanating from these two methods of investigation.

Sex differentiation studies must be extended as well as longer term follow up studies in order to determine the extended consequences of exposure to anti-social and pro-social media. This study enabled researchers to examine the intermediate term effects of concentrated exposure. Longer term studies may result in the emergence of different patterns.

Lastly, even though the study encompassed a fairly broad age range (7-17 years), more extensive studies of youths, particularly aged 15 to 25 would be most desirable.

Media Policy. Polciy recommendations for the T.V. industry are made based on the results of this study:

1. The present emphasis in athletic televising tends very much toward the professional team athletic events which stress

"winning" and sometimes "winning at all costs". This study recommends increased coverage of sports which stress goals such as participation and "playing for fun and recreation". This purpose would be served by the increased coverage of school and amateur sports. Common pro-social behavior, which is a matter of custom, can be generated in the coverage of such sports as tennis and golf. Finally, a beseiged television industry that is concerned about its responsibility to society should be susceptible to "negative cost" Canadian content such as school/amateur sport and programs which would appeal to both the children and adults involved.

2. In activity coverage which normally by their nature do not generally provide pro-social models, it would be possible to provide increased pro-social input by the inclusions of cameo features stressing the difference between professional athletics and amateur sport.

3. If the goal is to reduce aggression and violence in youth sport/athletics, the results of this study are clear; increase programming with a pro-social content, especially in sports/athletics.

4. Extensive pro-social visual sources should be used by the public media and/or all levels of sports/athletic organizations.

5. Research conducted by the television industry and government commissions indicate the realization that there is and a greater potential exists for an effect of T.V. upon North American youth. This study recommends a greater investment of energy and funds to emphasize the pro-social model and

the resultant positive behavioral aspects of sports activities. This can be accomplished by more amateur/school sports coverage and by utilizing local T.V. to convey the distinction in goal, method and means between amateur and professional sport/athletics. Mass media is a definite vehicle for providing appropriate pro-social models and could cover a vast number of participants (youth and adults) involved in youth sports/athletics.

CREDITS

Segments from "Violence in America" courtesy of NBC Television.

Segments from "Reflection on Violence" courtesy of the Ontario Royal Commission on Violence in the Communications Industry.

The results of the Ontario Royal Commission on Violence in the Communications Industry are available in eight volumes from:

Publications Centre, Ministry of Government Services, Queen's Park, Toronto, Ontario:

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